

Teaching Comprehension Strategies Using Informational Text

Comprehension—constructing meaning from text—depends on readers’ conscious or automatic use of comprehension strategies. Teaching students strategies to help them comprehend is important—even for students who are still developing word-level proficiency (Pearson & Duke, 2002; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Children who learn comprehension strategies in the early years will become stronger, more capable readers, who are better able to cope with more advanced texts.

We know that strategies can be taught effectively when the teacher explains directly what the strategy is, how to use it, and when it is appropriate (Duffy, 2002). Explaining the strategy can be followed by teacher modeling, guided practice for the students, and gradual release of responsibility to the students for carrying out the strategy on their own (Pearson & Duke, 2002). However, this sequence is far from being a rigid plan to follow in strategy instruction. As Duffy (2002) explains, “Success depends on thoughtfully selecting and then adapting techniques that fit the situation” (p. 38). Success requires that teachers know what the strategies are and when they are appropriate, recognize when the students are ready to learn them, and help students learn to be strategic. Ideally “teachers and students act as a literary community, using strategies to construct and evaluate interpretations of text” (El-Dinary, 2002, p. 202).

Certain reading comprehension strategies are particularly useful in reading informational text and, therefore, are best developed using these texts (see Figure 10). The most useful strategies for informational text are accessing prior knowledge; predicting based on titles, headings,

FIGURE 10
*Comprehension
 Strategies for
 Informational
 Text*

Before Reading	During Reading	After Reading
Accessing prior knowledge	Making connections	Summarizing
Predicting	Questioning	Creating pictures and graphs
Questioning	Visualizing	
	Inferencing	
	Using text structure to identify major ideas	
	Paraphrasing	
	Clarifying	

and pictures; inferencing; questioning; visualizing; using text structure to identify major ideas; making connections; and summarizing (Kletzien, 1991). These strategies can be used before, during, and after reading. (Note that we use the term *strategy* for what the readers themselves do to construct meaning. In this book we do not use the term *strategies* to refer to techniques, such as DRTA [Stauffer, 1975] or K-W-L [Ogle, 1986] that teachers use as part of their lessons.)

Strategies can be introduced one at a time so that students can understand specifically what the strategy is, how it can be done, and when it is appropriate. The eventual goal is to enable the students to learn to "be strategic" rather than simply to know a lot of strategies. This means that students need to be able to orchestrate a group of strategies, knowing which ones are appropriate for any given task or text, knowing how to choose among the strategies they know, and knowing when the strategies will be useful (Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996; NICHD, 2000). Although this may seem like a daunting task for primary-grade readers, learning to be strategic can be supported through read-alouds as well as through instructional reading groups. This will give young readers ample opportunity to work with being strategic even before they are proficient at decoding. Van den

Broek and Kremer (2000) make the argument that for beginning readers, many of the important reading strategies can be taught even before children are reading; in fact, it may be easier for them to learn these strategies in settings that do not require them to decode.

A suggested plan for strategy instruction (see Appendix A, page 124) is to introduce a text by talking to the children about the topic to access their prior knowledge. Then, if it is the first time a strategy has been introduced, provide direct instruction in what the strategy is, how it is done, when it is appropriate, and why it is useful. Next, model using the strategy with the chosen text, gradually having children join in using the strategy as they read the text. Discuss using the strategy throughout the text and then review at the end of the lesson what the strategy was, how the children used it, when they might use it again, and how it helped them.

It is important to provide ample practice for the strategies following the initial lesson. Children need to have scaffolded lessons in which the teacher gradually releases the responsibility for using the strategy to the children. This can be done by having children first work with the teacher, then work in pairs or small groups before being expected to carry out the strategies independently. As in most other learning tasks, some children will begin to use the strategies quickly whereas others will need additional practice before they can use them proficiently. It is vitally important, however, to have this practice within the context of real reading for meaning so that children will learn the importance of using strategies for comprehension. Using strategies in quest of comprehension in authentic reading situations will prevent the problem of having children who can perform a skill in isolation but cannot transfer it to reading situations.

Providing lots of practice in authentic contexts becomes easier as teachers realize that they can teach these strategies while working with content areas such as science and social studies. As children read these content area texts, they should always be encouraged to use the comprehension strategies that have been introduced. In this way, they are not only getting additional practice, but they are also having the opportunity to apply the strategies to new text for real purposes.

Once the strategies have been introduced, taught, and practiced, children can simply be reminded to use the strategies they know.

Children can even be asked which strategies they find appropriate for the text and the task before they read, and which ones they used after they have completed the reading. It is important to remember that strategy use is idiosyncratic; that is, what may work well for one individual may not work so well for another; what may work well for one text may not work well for a different text. It is important that children have opportunities to learn and practice multiple strategies, but they may use different ones while reading the very same text.

Before-Reading Strategies

Before reading a selection, teachers should activate students' prior knowledge, assess what prior knowledge they have, provide any additional needed information, arouse curiosity, and motivate students to want to read. Strategies most likely to be useful before reading include accessing prior knowledge, and predicting based on title, headings, and pictures. Using informational text, teachers can introduce and model each of these strategies.

Accessing Prior Knowledge

To introduce the idea of accessing prior knowledge before reading, a second-grade teacher chose to read *Ducks!* (Gibbons, 2001). First, she showed the cover of the book to the children and explained to them that before they start reading about a topic, they should think about what they already know about it. She told the students that this would help them to be active readers who think about what they are reading and notice whether the text confirms or contradicts what they already know. She explained to the children that this is always a good idea when they are reading informational text.

Then, she modeled thinking about what she already knew about ducks. She mentioned seeing some ducks at the local pond where children were feeding them bread. She talked about the ducks' colors and the quacking sound they made. She listed these details on chart paper in front of the group. Then, she asked the children what they already knew or had heard about ducks and added these ideas to the chart paper. She intervened when one child contradicted something another one said by putting both ideas on the chart with question

marks and telling the children to look for the information while they were reading.

As the teacher and children read *Ducks!* the teacher referred to the list on the chart paper. If a fact was confirmed, she invited a child to put a check mark next to it. When a fact was refuted, she corrected it. For example, one child had said that ducks live in the ocean, which the book confirmed; however, the book also added that ducks live on lakes and streams. The teacher corrected the chart to read, "Ducks live in the ocean and on lakes and streams."

At the end of the reading, the teacher directed students to look at the chart paper with their confirmed and corrected facts. She asked them how they could find out about the facts that were neither confirmed nor corrected. The children suggested various strategies such as reading another book, looking at the ducks in the zoo or at the local pond, or asking an adult. She asked them how thinking about what they already knew helped them to understand and remember the information.

The teacher encouraged the children to develop a strategy for independent reading by supporting their efforts to access their prior knowledge, showing them how to read to confirm or refute their ideas, and directing their attention to other ways of finding out information. Having the children reflect on how the strategy helped them increased their metacognitive awareness and made it more likely that they would use this strategy in the future.

Predicting

Predicting in informational books is different from predicting in stories. In stories, readers predict what will happen, that is, how the story will unfold, what the characters will do, and what the resolution will be. In informational books, predicting is used to think about what kind of information the author has probably included.

As a small group of second graders was introduced to *Slap, Squeak & Scatter: How Animals Communicate* (Jenkins, 2001), one teacher demonstrated the predicting strategy. First, he read the title and showed the children the cover of the book. Then he reminded them that good readers predict what a book is about before they read it. He invited the children to predict what kinds of information would be in

the book. When the children seemed stuck, he modeled for them how to predict from the title:

Let's see, well, it says how animals communicate, so I would predict that the author will tell us what the animals might want to communicate—maybe where there is food or maybe that there is danger. I guess he will also tell us how animals communicate because they don't talk the way we do. Because the title is *Slap, Squeak, and Scatter*, I predict that some animals may slap something to communicate, some might squeak, and I don't know what it would mean to scatter.

At this point, the children became engaged and began talking about which animals might squeak and which ones might slap. The teacher directed their attention to the other prediction: What might the animals be trying to communicate?

After a brief discussion, the students took a "picture walk" through the book, discussing the illustrations and adding to their predictions about what would be in the book. The teacher reminded them that predicting what will be in the book is a good way to be active readers and that they can always use this strategy with informational books.

As the group read the book, students checked their predictions, frequently commenting on particular information that they had predicted would be presented. At the end of the lesson, the teacher again reminded the students about predicting what information would likely be included in an informational book. He checked their understanding by holding up *Growing Up Wild: Wolves* (Markle, 2001). The children were encouraged to predict what kind of information might be included in this book. After a quick picture walk, during which time the children added to their predictions of the kind of information that would be included, the teacher added the book to the reading corner and suggested that the students check their predictions during independent reading time.

Clearly, children will be able to use prediction for information only if they have had experience with informational books. When Cathy Yost, a second-grade teacher in Pennsylvania, reads informational books with her children, she makes explicit comments about the kind of information that an author has included. When she begins a new book, she asks the children to predict what the author has included. For example, before reading *Hungry, Hungry Sharks* (Cole,

1986), she asked children what kind of information they would expect to find in the book. Children began predicting specific facts about sharks, and Cathy used the opportunity to make the statements more general. One boy suggested that they will find out that sharks eat fish. Cathy responded by saying yes, they will probably find out what sharks eat...maybe fish. After modeling this kind of response two or three times, the children began making general statements about what they expect to read such as "where sharks live." Cathy reminded the children that they have read other books about animals that have included similar information.

Each time teachers read informational books with their children, they can remind them of these strategies until the children use them without being prompted.

During-Reading Strategies

During reading, teachers want children actively engaging in reading, monitoring their comprehension, and connecting new information with what is already known. Strategies most likely to be useful during reading include questioning, using text structure, visualizing, inferencing, making connections, and clarifying.

Questioning

Questioning is a powerful strategy to use with informational text either before or during reading. When teaching students about questioning, a teacher might use a collection of informational books about a particular topic. For example, one second-grade teacher used a text set about bears to introduce children to the idea of questioning (see Figure 11). First, she reminded children to think about what they already knew about bears before beginning reading. Then she explained to them that asking questions is a good strategy to use before and during reading. It will help them be active readers by reading to find answers to their questions.

She modeled how to look at one or two of the book covers, think about questions she had, and write these questions on sticky notes. She placed the notes on the table in front of the children. Then she invited the students to page through the books and think about questions they had. As the students volunteered questions, she jotted them on sticky

FIGURE 11*Text Set for
Bears*

- Berger, M. (1999). *Growl! A book about bears*. New York: Cartwheel.
- Gibbons, G. (2001). *Polar bears*. New York: Holiday House.
- Gill, S. (1992). *Alaska's three bears*. Ill. S. Cartwright. New York: Scholastic.
- Greenland, C. (1985). *Nature's children: Black bears*. Danbury, CT: Grolier.
- Greenland, C. (1986). *Nature's children: Grizzly bears*. Danbury, CT: Grolier.
- Greenland, C. (1986). *Nature's children: Polar bears*. Danbury, CT: Grolier.
- Hodge, D. (1997). *Bears: Polar bears, black bears and grizzly bears*. Ill. P. Stephens & N.G. Ogle. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press.
- Holmes, K.J. (1998). *Bears*. Minneapolis, MN: Bridgestone.
- Kalman, B., & Everts, T. (1994). *Bears*. New York: Crabtree.
- Markle, S. (2000). *Growing up wild: Bears*. New York: Atheneum.
- Merrick, P. (2000). *Bears*. Chanhassen, MN: The Child's World.
- Simon, S. (2002). *See More Readers: Wild bears*. New York: SeaStar.
- Whitehouse, P. (2002). *Brown bear*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

notes and added them to the collection on the table. After many questions had been generated, she led the children into categorizing them. Identified categories included where bears live, what bears eat, and differences between types of bears. Some of the children's questions related to specific pictures in the book—such as “Why are these bears fighting?”—and thus did not fit into the categories. These questions were put into a separate group.

The teacher pointed out that informational books do not have to be read from beginning to end, but instead can be used to find answers to questions. She pointed to the questions about what bears eat and showed children the table of contents from *Bears* (Merrick, 2000) in which one chapter is titled “What Do Bears Eat?” She modeled for students how to read the table of contents to find the chapter about what bears eat and find the page where the chapter begins. (See chapter 6 for more information about how to teach children to use the table of contents and index.)

As students turned to the specific page and began reading, they found the answers to several of their questions. Each time students found an answer to a question, the teacher stopped them to make sure that they understood that the answer had been found. She then asked the students to put the sticky note with the question on the page that answered the question.

The teacher showed students that additional questions might be raised during reading. She put a stack of blank sticky notes on the table for children to use to add to their questions. She explained that they might need to read other books, magazines, or Internet pages to find additional information to answer their questions.

As these second-grade students used the text set to try to find answers to their other questions, they soon discovered that not all the books had tables of contents. The teacher helped them skim the pictures and text to search for clues to locate the information.

Using Text Structure

Most children have a fairly good grasp of story structure; that is, they expect to have characters, a problem, and a resolution. They may learn this through direct instruction or by countless hours of watching, listening to, or reading stories. Informational text structures, on the other hand, are more varied, and many children do not have the same experience with them as with stories. Yet we know that using text structure is an important part of being a strategic reader (Kletzien, 1992) and that understanding expository text structure can help children comprehend (Richgels, McGee, Lomax, & Sheard, 1987; Roller, 1990).

The most common text structures in informational writing are cause-effect, comparison-contrast, sequence, description, and problem-solution (Kane, 1998; Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980; see Appendix A, page 125). Books such as *Bears* (Merrick, 2000) use a question-answer structure that is also commonly found in informational books for children. *Slap, Squeak and Scatter* (Jenkins, 2001) follows another often-used structure: generalization followed by examples. Usually these structures have key words that signal when they are being used. Although teachers may want to wait until the intermediate grades for in-depth instruction on these structures, introducing some of them to primary-grade children will enable them to use the structures more proficiently later in reading and writing.

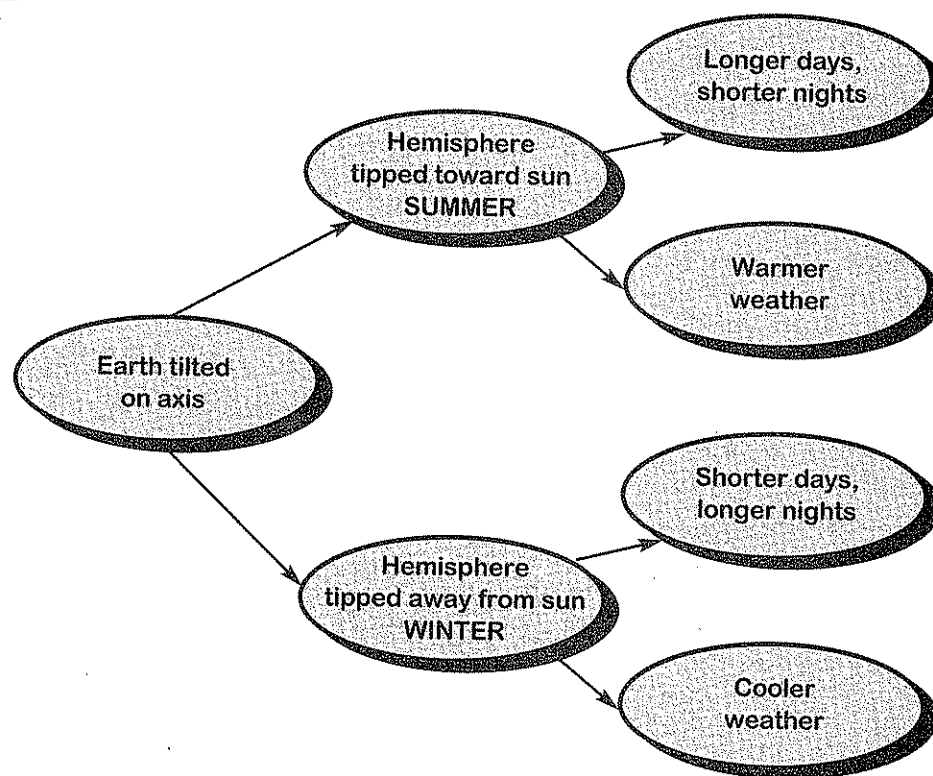
In addition to teaching children to notice key words that often accompany a particular structure, teachers can introduce graphic organizers to help them record information. Children can use a simple organizer for each structure to help them focus on the major ideas

from selections and to raise their awareness of the overall structure of the text (Feldt, Feldt, & Kilburg, 2002). Appropriate graphic organizers are introduced individually as books with particular text structures are discussed. As a small-group or whole-class activity, children read a selection, identify the structure, and then fill in the appropriate organizer. In the following sections, we provide examples of these graphic organizers; these also can be used for writing summaries or reports (see chapter 7 for writing ideas).

Cause-Effect. Using a book such as *The Reasons for Seasons* (Gibbons, 1995) is a good way to introduce children to the cause-effect structure common in informational books. Although there is description in this book as well, the major structure is cause-effect. The author explains through text and diagrams what makes the seasons (see Figure 12).

FIGURE 12

*Cause-Effect
Graphic for
The Reasons
for Seasons*



Comparison-Contrast. Using the math book *If You Hopped Like a Frog* (Schwartz, 1999), teachers can have children think about what they would be able to do if they had the abilities of different animals and insects. Many comparison-contrast books, such as *Wasps & Bees* (Meadows & Vail, 2003), are available about creatures that are often confused. A comparison chart or Venn diagram, both of which show similarities and differences, can be used to help children clarify their understanding of these animals' characteristics (see Figure 13).

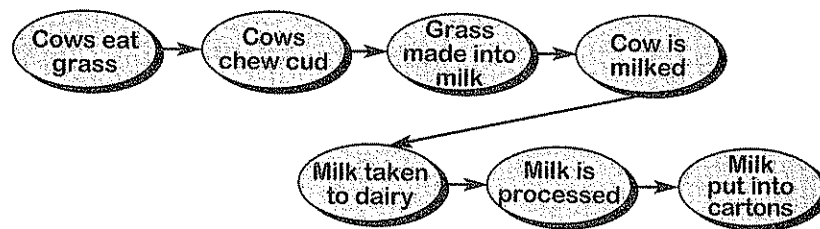
Sequence. Many informational books are written in sequence. Most how-to books that give directions have this structure. For example, *How to Draw Trucks and Cars* (Smith, 1996) gives step-by-step instructions for drawing a number of different kinds of cars and trucks. In this particular book, the steps are numbered, making it easy for children to understand the idea of sequence.

Another example, *Milk: From Cow to Carton* (Alik, 1974), begins with a cow eating grass and ends with pouring milk into cartons at the dairy. One way that teachers could make the sequence in this book more obvious to children would be to have them list the events in order or to create a timeline (see Figure 14). The author uses many typical sequence words such as *then* and *after* in this book.

Wasps	Both	Bees
Thin waist	Found everywhere in the world	Thick waist
Few body hairs	3 pairs of legs	Thick coat of body hair
Most don't sting	1 pair antennae	All can sting
Wasps that sting use sting to kill prey and to protect themselves	Bodies have 3 parts	Use sting only to protect themselves
Wasps that sting can do so multiple times		Can sting only once

FIGURE 13

Comparison
Chart for
Wasps and
Bees

FIGURE 14*Sequence for
Milk*

Description. The book *Dolphins* (James, 2002), written in a description structure, provides detailed information about what dolphins look like, what they eat, and where they live. A concept map would help children organize this information (see Figure 15). Because many books are written in a description structure, children should be encouraged to create concept maps showing how ideas are related. The resulting maps also can be used for writing summaries or reports (see chapter 7).

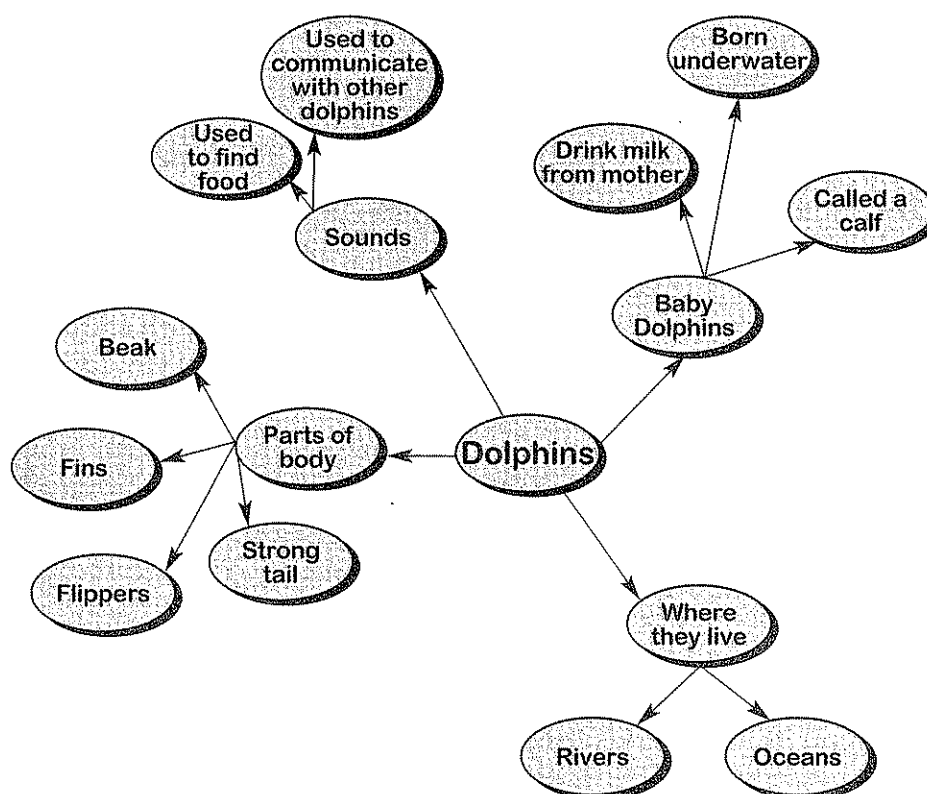
Children can be encouraged to look for examples of structures as they read informational text and will find many texts with multiple structures. For this reason, it is important not to insist on a single interpretation of what the text structure is; rather, encourage children to discuss which parts of the text represent different text structures. After children practice identifying these text structures, they can begin to use them in their own writing (see chapter 7 for ideas about writing).

Other During-Reading Strategies

Similar lessons can be developed to introduce other during-reading strategies such as visualizing, making intertextual and personal connections, inferencing, and clarifying. With very young children, it is effective to use a sequence of visualization activities based on suggestions by Fredericks (1986). To help children “make pictures in their heads,” he suggests starting by holding up concrete objects in class, asking them to close their eyes and “see” the object in their minds. After practice with classroom objects, children can close their eyes and see familiar things such as their bedroom, their mother’s face, or their street. After this practice, Fredericks suggests reading aloud to

FIGURE 15

Concept Map
for Dolphins



them a description of something familiar, such as a dog, and asking them to visualize it. The children can change the pictures in their minds to match the dog's color, size, stance, and activity. This progression helps young children understand what it is to make a picture in their heads. Once children understand the concept, they can visualize using simple informational texts with the illustrations covered so that they use the text rather than the pictures for visual details. A logical extension of visualization is drawing. Children can draw a picture that they see in their minds after they have read or heard informational text. For example, while reading or listening to *If You Hopped Like a Frog* (Schwartz, 1999), children might picture themselves performing some of the amazing feats described and draw what they have pictured as a culminating activity for the lesson.

In order to make inferences, children connect what they already know with what they read (or hear) in the text. This means that it is difficult to make inferences about something they know nothing about. Lessons can be developed in which children are encouraged to "read beyond the text" to make inferences. For example, Cathy Yost's second graders read "As soon as they are born, the pups go their own way. It is not safe to stay near a hungry mother" from *Hungry, Hungry Sharks* (Cole, 1986, p. 24). Cathy asked the children to think about what that might mean: Why would it not be safe to stay near a hungry mother? The children quickly made the inference that mother sharks sometimes eat their babies.

Making connections with what they already know is another strategy that young children can use when reading informational text. Children can learn to make intertextual connections as well as connections with what they have experienced themselves (Oyler, 1996). Use of text sets when exploring particular topics contributes to children's ability and interest in making intertextual connections. Having a list of books that have been used as read-alouds (as suggested in chapter 4) or a list of books that the children have read independently (as suggested in chapter 8) will help them make these intertextual connections.

Clarifying (Palincsar & Brown, 1989) is a strategy that is closely aligned with comprehension monitoring. When children realize that there is something that they do not understand, they should seek to clarify meaning. Sometimes it is a vocabulary word that they do not know; sometimes the difficulty is related to sentence construction or lack of information. It is important that children learn that reading is supposed to make sense, and if it does not, they should go back to the text and try to figure out the answer.

Repeated modeling and discussion of these strategies can encourage children to use strategies when reading independently. Even first graders can talk about intertextual connections, inferencing, clarifying, and making pictures in their heads, becoming metacognitively aware of these strategies when teachers and peers discuss them.

After-Reading Strategies

After reading, teachers want students to reflect on what they have read, integrate new knowledge with what they already know, think about how the reading might be related to their own lives, and be able to apply new knowledge to new situations. Strategies most likely to be useful after reading include creating pictures or graphs and summarizing the material. The kind of reflection necessary to summarize, either in language or in pictures and graphs, helps children check their reading comprehension. Through the deep processing required to convert text into a graphical representation, children strengthen their understanding and also remember the information for a longer time.

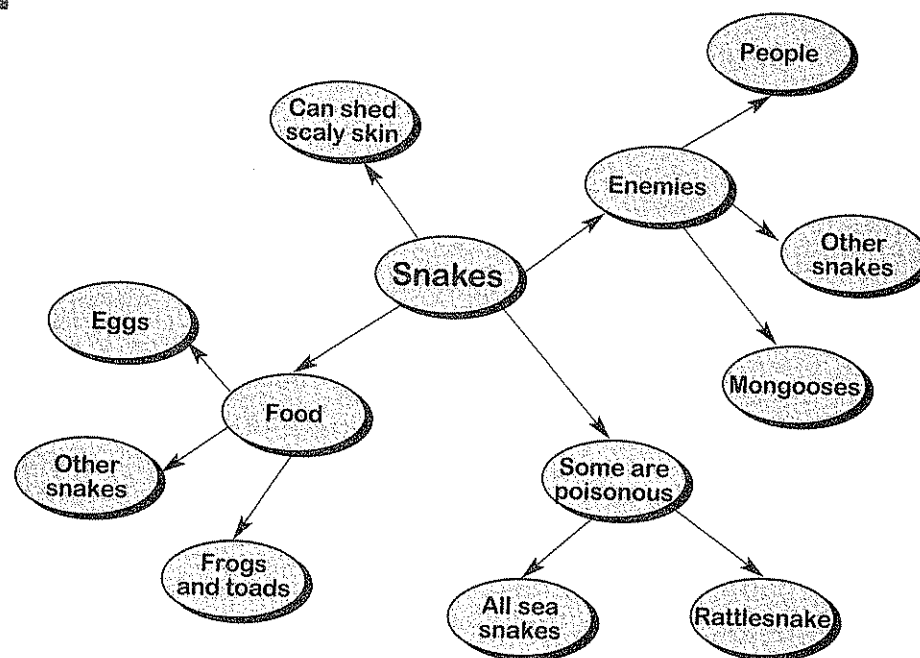
Creating Pictures and Graphs

Using pictures or graphs to show understanding seems to be natural for young children. Pictures and graphs tend to come more easily to most children than writing in complete sentences. Indeed, most children draw information before they begin writing it. This natural tendency toward pictures and graphs can be used to help children reflect on information that they have learned from reading independently or listening to a read-aloud. These representations can include concept maps, diagrams, pictures with captions, cause-effect graphics, compare-contrast charts, or timelines.

For example, children who have read *Snake* (Hoffman, 1986) might respond to the information by drawing pictures of the most important ideas, which might include snakes with fangs, snakes shedding their skins, or snakes swallowing their prey. Children could write captions to explain their drawings.

Many teachers use concept mapping in writing instruction to help children think about what they want to write. The same kind of map can be used to help children reflect on information that they have learned from reading *Snake* (see Figure 16). Children's maps could include what snakes eat, what they look like, which ones are poisonous, and who their enemies are.

A more advanced use of graphical representation might be for children who have read Kroll's (1994) account of the Lewis and Clark expedition to create timelines with the important events from the journey

FIGURE 16*Concept Map
for Snake*

or create maps showing the route that Lewis and Clark took. Also, children might draw pictures of particularly important events during the expedition and provide captions with explanatory information.

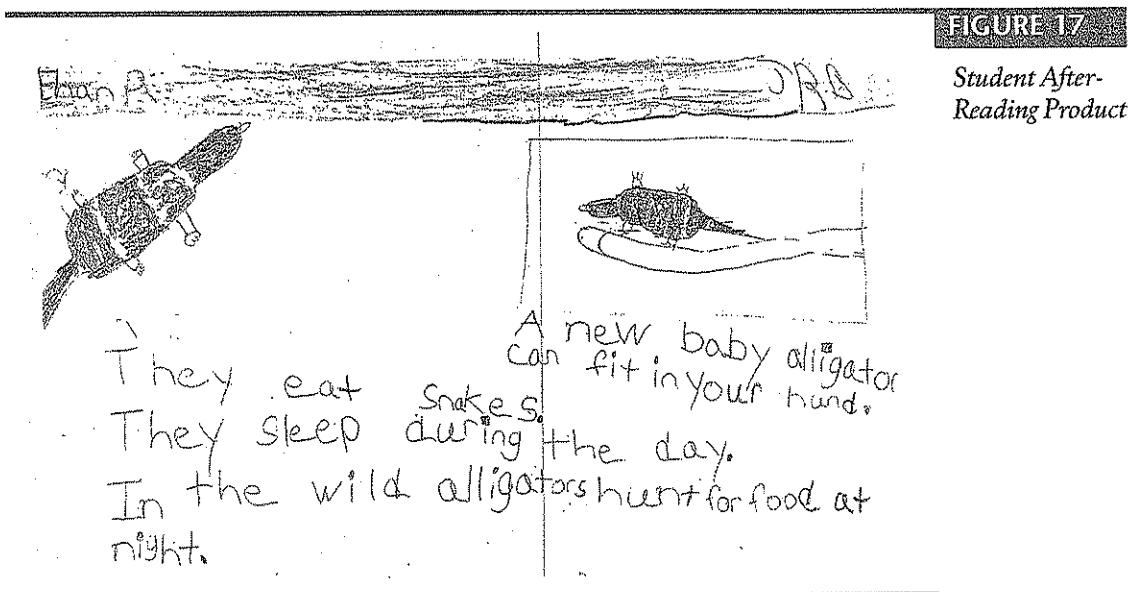
Heather McGinn, a teacher in Pennsylvania, encourages her first-grade students to draw pictures to help them think about what they have read or heard. These after-reading products are usually a combination of pictures and text (see Figure 17 for a student's response to reading about alligators). This activity enables students to process the information they have learned.

Summarizing

Summarizing is not an easy strategy, so it is better for students to begin with texts that are short and fairly easy to summarize, such as a magazine article, an Internet source, or part of a book. It is necessary to provide a lot of guidance and practice before expecting children to be able to do this on their own.

A teacher can explain that a summary is a short way of retelling a passage in your own words. Then, she can provide practice with short paragraphs in either small groups or with the whole class. A teacher can encourage children to use their own words to summarize as they discuss text. For example, in *Ruth Law Thrills a Nation* (Brown, 1993), the text states, "She put on two woolen suits, one on top of the other. Then she put on two leather suits and covered her bulky outfit with a skirt" (n.p.). Children can learn to summarize this by stating, "She wore lots of clothes."

Sharon Craig, a former primary-grade teacher in Maryland, has developed a technique that teaches students to summarize. After looking at a text, she and her students generate a question or turn a subheading into a question. Together they read the first sentence, and she asks, "Does this sentence help us answer our question?" If not, they move on to the next sentence. If it does, she says, "Show me the words or phrases we need to highlight that give us this information." Sharon tells the children to imagine that each word costs \$1.00, so they have to be careful not to choose too many. They negotiate the words that should be highlighted and then reread only the highlighted part to see if they understand the information. If they select too little information,



they go back and highlight additional words. They continue in this way until they reach the end of the section, then they reread the question and do a quick read of the highlighted words and phrases to be sure they have answered the question. With first graders and early second graders, Sharon continues to guide the process. With older children, she gradually releases responsibility for the process to them, first through paired work and then through independent practice.

After they have highlighted the information, students construct a concept map using the questions as categories. They copy the highlighted words or phrases under the appropriate categories. They review the maps and check off the most important information. Then they write their summaries using their maps. Through the process, students learn to paraphrase as well as summarize.

Sharon writes, "The process is very concrete, and although time consuming, is very successful. The children not only learn how strategic readers construct and monitor meaning, but they quickly acquire the comprehension strategies for their own use" (personal communication, February, 28, 2003).

Based on the work of Brown, Campione, and Day (1981) and Kintsch and Van Dijk (1978), macro rules for summarizing are as follows:

1. Delete unnecessary material.
2. Delete redundant material.
3. Use one word to replace a list of items.
4. Use one word to replace individual parts of an action.
5. Select or create a topic sentence.

We do not suggest teaching all these rules at one time to primary-grade children; however, they provide a good guide for teachers in planning lessons in summarizing. Children can learn to use these rules as they work with text if they are provided with ample guidance and practice.

Teaching Techniques

As previously explained, the term *strategy* refers to what readers do and *technique* refers to what teachers do. Popular teaching techniques used with informational text often embed the previously discussed

comprehension strategies (Bednar & Kletzien, 1993). For example, K-W-L (Ogle, 1986) includes accessing prior knowledge (What I Know), questioning (What I Want to Learn), and summarizing (What I Have Learned). Questioning the Author (Beck, McKeown, Sandora, & Worthy, 1996) uses clarifying, summarizing, and questioning. Reciprocal teaching (Brown & Palincsar, 1985) uses clarifying, questioning, summarizing, and predicting. When we use these teaching techniques with children, we always explain the comprehension strategies that are being used. The goal is for children to learn to use the strategies independently while they are reading. We believe that explicit explanation and practice in connected reading are the best ways for children to become strategic readers.

Orchestrating Several Strategies

Good readers use more than one strategy when they read; they orchestrate several strategies to construct meaning, shifting from one to another and integrating the strategies with ease. The goal is to help children learn to be strategic in their reading by using a repertoire of comprehension strategies.

Susan Smith, a special education teacher in Pennsylvania, showed her group of learning support students how to coordinate questioning, predicting, and making connections as they read *Rosie: A Visiting Dog's Story* (Calmenson, 2001). As Susan worked with this group, it was clear that they had had much experience with informational books. She asked them to look at the pictures and tell what kind of book it is. All the children were able to identify the book as informational because of the photographs. She asked them to think about questions that they might have based on the pictures, and she modeled for them one of her own questions. Each child contributed at least one question based on the pictures, which Susan wrote on the dry-erase board.

One boy predicted that Rosie is a therapy dog. Susan asked him to tell the group what a therapy dog is and why he thought that is what the book is about. After he shared his thoughts, Susan complimented him for making the personal connection and reminded the group to always look for connections to themselves or to other books they have read.

As the children read the book, Susan demonstrated how additional questions are generated based on the text and pictures. One girl commented that she didn't think that dogs were allowed in hospitals, so she wondered why there is a picture of the dog in the hospital.

Susan invited connections between the story and the children's personal experiences with dogs and puppies. When the children's connections began to veer from what was needed to help understand the text, Susan skillfully reminded them that connections are useful only when they further understanding—not when they go off topic.

The group of students was completely engaged with the text. They discussed the issues knowledgeably and were reluctant to put the books away when Susan told them to go to lunch. After checking the answered and remaining questions and with a promise to return to the book the following day, the children left the room still talking about Rosie the visiting dog.

Throughout the lesson, Susan and her students negotiated reading strategically, orchestrating predictions, accessing prior knowledge, making personal connections, and questioning. It is clear that these children with special learning needs were able to use these comprehension strategies effectively.

Summary

Primary-grade children can be taught to use comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading informational text. These strategies can be taught using read-alouds or in small- or large-group instruction. Teachers need to explain the strategies directly, model their use, and provide lots of guided practice. The goal is to help children become strategic readers, able to orchestrate a number of strategies to help themselves comprehend. In the following chapters, we provide suggestions for teaching children to use informational text for research and as models for their own writing.